

Nigeria: Customs Foils Illegal Wildlife Trade, Recovers N126m Elephant Tusks

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Federal Operations Unit (FOU) Zone A, Lagos, has recorded a major breakthrough in the fight against wildlife trafficking with the interception of 22 pieces of elephant tusks valued at N126.39 million on the international black market.

The operation, carried out in collaboration with the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) and the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC), also led to the arrest of four suspected members of a wildlife trafficking syndicate and the seizure of a vehicle believed to have been used in the illegal operation.

According to the Customs Service, the seizure followed a well-coordinated intelligence-driven operation involving surveillance and investigations by officers of the Federal Operations Unit Zone A and the SIS A Team of the Customs Intelligence Unit, with support from partner agencies.

The elephant tusks, weighing a total of 130.84 kilogrammes, were intercepted at about 4:30 p.m. on June 13, 2026, in Ofada, Mowe area of Ogun State, while other suspects linked to the syndicate were apprehended simultaneously at various locations in Lagos State.

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Customs authorities said the tusks, derived from endangered elephants, were destined for illegal markets where ivory products continue to command high prices despite global efforts to curb the trade.

Speaking on the seizure, Comptroller of the Federal Operations Unit Zone A, Gambo Aliyu, described the operation as a significant success in the agency's ongoing efforts to enforce wildlife protection laws and combat transnational environmental crimes.

He said the recovery demonstrates the unit's commitment to implementing national and international regulations aimed at protecting endangered species from exploitation.

"This seizure is a clear demonstration of our resolve to enforce national and international wildlife protection laws. It reflects our determination to prevent Nigeria from being used as a hub or transit route for illegal wildlife trafficking activities," Aliyu stated.

The comptroller noted that Nigeria is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which regulates and prohibits the illegal trade in endangered species. He also referenced Section 55(1)(i) of the Nigeria Customs Service Act 2023, which outlaws the trafficking of protected wildlife species.

Aliyu further stressed that the operation highlights the importance of inter-agency collaboration in tackling sophisticated criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking.

He commended NESREA and the Wildlife Justice Commission for their strategic support, intelligence sharing and operational partnership, noting that the success of the operation would not have been possible without their contributions.

"The role played by our partners was invaluable. Their cooperation and expertise greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the operation and contributed significantly to this achievement," he said.

The Customs boss warned traffickers and other criminal elements against exploiting Nigeria's borders for illegal wildlife trade, assuring that the Service would continue to strengthen surveillance and intelligence-led enforcement actions.

He also appealed to members of the public to support ongoing efforts by reporting suspicious shipments, movements or activities linked to wildlife trafficking.

"The public has a critical role to play in protecting our biodiversity. We encourage anyone with useful information on wildlife trafficking syndicates to come forward. The Nigeria Customs Service will continue to take decisive action against all violators of the law," he added.

The recovered elephant tusks, vehicle and the four suspects remain in Customs custody as investigations continue ahead of possible prosecution.

The seizure is one of the latest efforts by Nigerian authorities to combat the illicit wildlife trade, a multi-billion-dollar global criminal enterprise that threatens endangered species and undermines biodiversity conservation efforts world.

